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DRAFT REPORT OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE FOR PROGRAMME MATTERS ON ITS IN-SESSIONAL MEETING HELD DURING THE FORTIETH SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL, 1-18 JUNE 1993

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CHAPTER VII. PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT ISSUES, INCLUDING DECENTRALIZATION AND THE COUNTRY PROGRAMME APPROACH

1. The Assistant Administrator presented document DP/1993/24. Discussion followed on the programme approach and guiding principles, the programme support document, decentralization and mid-term review and monitoring.

2. Several delegations expressed their satisfaction with the discussion, which had provided an opportunity to exchange ideas among themselves and with the Administration. They looked forward to similar discussions at future meetings of the Standing Committee.

Programme approach and Programme Support Document

3. A draft of the Guiding Principles for the Programme Approach was presented to Governments at an informal session of the Governing Council in September 1992. Delegations that inquired about the delay in the distribution of the Guiding Principles were informed that they had now been circulated to all UNDP offices. The Programme Support Document (PSD) would similarly be distributed shortly to all offices. The need to incorporate feedback from the specialized agencies was given as the main reason for the delay.

4. Questions were raised about the nature of the PSD. Inquiries were also made about national programme managers and their relationship with UNDP.

5. It was explained that the PSD represents the attempt of UNDP to respond to General Assembly resolution 44/211 of 22 December 1989, which contained calls for more programme-oriented mechanisms.

6. The Committee was informed that the focus of the new country programme was on the overall support needed to develop and implement three or four national programmes. It conveyed in broad terms the totality of UNDP cooperation proposed for the period covered, normally five years. The PSD was the instrument, formulated subsequently, to justify and present in detail UNDP support to each of the three or four programmes. It explained why UNDP, in accordance with its mandate, was involved and what it would be doing in terms of capacity-building. It contained indicators of success and financial information by output and inputs. The PSD was designed to be a flexible document.

7. Regarding national programme managers, it was explained that the programme approach worked only if it was adopted at the national level with commitment on the part of the national authorities. Similarly, the programme manager had to be a national if ownership and sustainability were to be goals. UNDP might provide logistic support and expertise to assist managers to carry out their task efficiently.

8. Some delegations felt that the country programmes still did not fully reflect the programme approach. In response, it was explained that the new format for country programmes had to be introduced in early 1991 before agreement had been reached on what exactly constituted the programme approach. For the sixth programming cycle, the format of the country programme would be brought in line with the programme approach.

9. Referring to paragraph 15, and to the omission of a country that, as pointed out by one delegation, had been applying the programme approach, it was explained that the list presented in the paragraph was not exhaustive.

10. There was agreement that the terminology used in the context of programming was not always clear or even precisely defined: in particular, the word "programme" was used to refer to several different concepts. Several delegations preferred to keep the term "country programme" rather than to replace it with "UNDP country strategy".

Decentralization and coordination

11. The issue of decentralization and the financial delegation of authority to the field was addressed by the Committee. The work done in that regard by the Administrator was commended by several delegations. In addition, specific queries were made as to the actual extent of financial delegation referred to in the report. While it was stated in paragraph 19 that the Resident Representative had financial approval authority up to $1 million, it was stated in paragraph 20 (a) that delegation to the Resident Representative is at the discretion of the Director of the Regional Bureau. Furthermore, delegations inquired whether the $1 million level existed for all projects, irrespective of the size of the programme, and whether further decentralization was contemplated.

12. In reply to the points raised, the Assistant Administrator confirmed that the amount delegated to the Resident Representative was $1 million for all projects, irrespective of the size of the programme; that decentralization was considered to be a process that continued to evolve and that the discretion mentioned in paragraph 20 (a) referred to projects over $3 million and to the mandated hierarchical relationship existing between a Resident Representative and a Regional Bureau Director.

13. Additional clarifications made in relation to queries by delegations related to the Administrator's intention to strengthen national expertise as a strategy for empowering field staff capacity (para 24. (a)); to the introduction of monitoring and financial systems to facilitate the decentralization of both programme and financial authority; and to the emphasis on introducing substantive indicators for monitoring country office programme quality. Finally, the Assistant Administrator described how the enhanced Division Chief concept was being progressively applied through increased consultation and teamwork between headquarters and the country offices.

14. Concern was raised about the need to reinforce field offices substantively and to strengthen national personnel involved in national execution. It was observed that staff numbers were in most cases sufficient. It was rather a question of having the right staff profile and prioritizing functions. To that effect, the Assistant Administrator stated that good, substantive Professional staff were in the field offices and that local expertise was increasingly drawn upon. It was not feasible to have technical expertise in every field, but experts could be brought in to appraise and evaluate programme support.

15. Some delegations also expressed concern about the lack of resources available to the resident coordinator and asked whether indeed any resources were at the disposal of the resident coordinator for coordination purposes. In answer to the inquiry, it was explained that the resident coordinator as such had no budget to support the tasks and functions of the post.

Mid-term review and monitoring

16. It was observed that evaluation and reporting on earlier projects were not adequately reflected in the country programmes. Past experience, tangible results and successes were not well documented. There was a general concern that more emphasis should be placed on monitoring and evaluation. It was suggested that, if Professional staff in field offices delegated administrative tasks to national counterparts, they could do more monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes.

17. Concerning mid-term reviews, some delegations inquired about the process and the selection of the programmes to be reviewed. It was explained that the mid-term review was the occasion to assess how UNDP was trying to meet the objectives of the current cycle. A tentative schedule (DP/1993/6) had been considered by the Governing Council in February 1993; it would be updated in early 1994. The Council would decide in advance which individual reviews it wished to see.

18. Efforts would be made to include more explicit success indicators in the country programmes. However, it was not easy at the time of preparing the

country programme to determine the specific contribution of UNDP. Those details would be included in the programme support documents formulated subsequently.

19. The Central Evaluation Office (CEO) had worked on the question of evaluating the UNDP contribution to country programmes. A substantive presentation on monitoring and evaluation would constitute a separate subject of discussion at the current session of the Governing Council.